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THE HOLINESS OF BAPTIZED INFANTS.

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## A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

Parish Church of Morchard Bishop,

On SUNDAY, APRIL 28th, 1850,

BY

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ARCHDEACON OF BARNSTAPLE, AND RECTOR OF MORCHARD BISHOP

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## To the Reader.

THE time at which this Sermon was published, perhaps the tone in which it is written, (which may be traced to that fulness of the heart out of which the mouth speaketh,) and the distinguishing notice taken of it by the Bishop of Exeter in his “Letter to the Churchwardens of Brampford Speke,” may very naturally lead to the conclusion, that it was written with an express view to the Controversy, which has of necessity occupied the thoughts of all to whom God’s Truth is dear.

Glad am I, and thankful, to be permitted to bear my testimony, in any way, and under any circumstances, to the Truth which has been so called in question; but the Sermon will not be read, perhaps, with less interest, if it shall be known, that it was written in the simple discharge of ministerial and parochial Duty. The immediate motive and object in writing it was to speak the word of consolation to Parents, who

suddenly, and without even an hour's warning, were bereaved of the infant Child, whom they had first given to God in Baptism.

I venture to add here the Inscription on that Infant's Tomb, as briefly conveying the Doctrine which the Sermon is meant at greater length to affirm.

HERE RESTETH A BELOVED INFANT,  
\* \* \* \* \*  
BAPTIZED NOVEMBER 4, 1849 ;  
CALLED HENCE  
TO THE INHERITANCE OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD  
IN CHRIST JESUS,  
APRIL 24, 1850.

J. B.

*Morchart, September 12th, 1850.*

## S E R M O N.

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*St. Mark x. 14.*

“SUFFER THE LITTLE CHILDREN TO COME UNTO ME, AND  
FORBID THEM NOT, FOR OF SUCH IS THE  
KINGDOM OF GOD.”

THERE are few passages in Scripture with which we are more familiar than with the words in the Text. They meet the ear as often as the Baptismal Service is read; and, because they are there read, we gladly connect them with the thought that Christ is ever calling our children,—ever calling to us to bring them to Him, that the sin of Adam, which is born with them, may be washed away in the Holy Rite ordained by Him, and of which He spake, before yet it *was* ordained, saying, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.”

In every house, by turns, this gladness makes itself felt. The mother forgets her pain and travail, in the thought that she has brought her infant to Christ in the Sacrament of Baptism. She gave him life with the stain of sin; Christ gives him life, and washes away the stain and the sin; the Church of God receives another soul within its courts; the Church that is invisible is increased by a visible addition to the number of God’s child-

ren ; and many of us (too many) have no thought of all this—no thought of this connection between earth and heaven—no thought of saints in heaven, who are one through Christ with saints on earth —no thought that a poor little weakly, puny, crying infant can be, by Baptism, in more close communion with God than they are, who, looking on its helplessness, think of it only as helpless, and never look upon it as holy ; and yet of this there can be no doubt. The children brought unto Christ, and so baptized, although no doubt the infection of sin abides in them, yet are they in Christ, holy, pure, fit for the presence of God, and for His indwelling, fit to be received among His holiest saints and servants in heaven ; and we, in the mean time, are actual sinners in His sight ; some without repentance, some without faith, some without love ; all standing in need of grace, all unworthy of His goodness ; some, we hope, brought near to Christ, strong in faith, sincere in penitence, yet most assuredly knowing that, were it not for the mercy of God, and the merits of Christ, they, even for their own sins, would be without hope, and would perish everlastingily.

You see my object, brethren, in calling your attention to that which the world and the men of the world do not see. I direct your attention to the holy and living infant, whose Life and Holiness is given by the Power and Grace of God. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh,” but in Baptism we see one “born of the Spirit.” It is thought of, and treated ordinarily, as a living *body*.

The nurse, the mother, the friends, speak of its health or its weakness, of its beauty and its comeliness ; but that which is of most importance, and is scarcely thought of by the generality, is, that it is a living *soul*—living by the mercy of God, through the pitying love of Christ, by the grace of the Holy Spirit—living, where too many around it are dead in unrepented sin—holy, where too many of those that look on it are unholy—one with Christ, where too many have parted from and forsaken Him—often creating a laugh amongst the thoughtless and the godless, if in its bodily weakness it shall cry whilst being baptized, but an object of reverential regard and love to the angels, who see in it not the mortal body, but the immortal soul,—who see it radiant with Grace in the beauty of Holiness and Innocence, the beloved of the Father, the saved of the Son, the workmanship of the Holy Ghost.

My brethren, you will not be surprised, if, with thoughts such as these springing up within me, I have looked with pity and wonder on those who, in their thoughtlessness or their ignorance, take no part in the solemn service, but sit on, as if they had nothing to do with the infant, as if the infant had nothing to do with Christ. I think I have said enough this day to show you that there is not upon earth for the faithful and believing heart, a more wonderful, soul-stirring spectacle than the Baptism of a little child ; that there is nothing so holy in all the things of earth, as such infant received by Christ according to His

Word, and visited by the Holy Spirit, and made, in Baptism, "a Member of Christ, a Child of God, and an Inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven." There is something beyond all measure attractive in the thought, that, as we look upon it, we are enabled to say, "Of such is the Kingdom of God." We have in no other way such sight of God's Kingdom presented to us,—in no place—in no person grown up to man's estate—can there be seen the work of the Spirit in the same unsullied, unstained purity; and yet there are those who would deprive us of such blessed sight, such happy, undoubting faith; there are those who would leave us in uncertainty about this *birth* by *Baptism*. May God guide them to the truth, by the light of His Holy Spirit! May God forgive their want of faith! May God preserve all parents from such deadly error, from the sorrow which may one day be theirs, if such doubts are sown, and take root, and spring up in their hearts, to the quenching of faith and truth.

Blessed are they that believe! But, my brethren, except we receive the truth in *such* faith as shall carry us in our own practice—in our own lives—more near to Christ, we shall lose a very large portion of the advantage and the blessing, which is thus freely granted to us all. Wicked parents will not see all I have been describing; worldly parents will have no reverence for the operation of the Holy Ghost, no sense of the blessedness of God's love and mercy in *so* pardoning sin, and *so* bestowing grace; and we have a proof of our

own indifference to the things of God, in the comparatively little interest which we take in the ministration of that Holy Sacrament, by which spiritual life is imparted, and sin pardoned, and the assurance given that God is our Father, and we His children, and that, if permitted to live in the body, our prayers will be accepted, and our spiritual wants supplied, and our faith increased: we ourselves coming boldly to the Throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Our indifference and blindness to the things which belong unto our peace, grow on us in a most wonderful manner, and such blindness is practically unbelief; too often the keener our eyesight may be in mere things of the world, the greater is our blindness in things pertaining to God. If I were to enter some houses, and say to the father or mother of a child, which God has given them, "Let me see that very holy thing which Christ has washed clean from sin by water and the Holy Spirit," some parents might wonder what I could mean; some might laugh; some might think me in jest, or out of my senses; while some few would have the tear glistening in the eye, and would look on their child as the Virgin looked on her blessed Infant; and though they would know that, if their child were permitted to live, it would sin, and that it came into the world stained with sin, being unlike in both these respects to the Holy Child Jesus,—yet they would know that in its present state it was a child of God by

Grace (the Grace given in Baptism,) and holy, and innocent; and the father's look and mother's kiss would be given as to a being that stood higher in God's love than themselves, because pure from sin ; they would know that it was fit and ready to be called hence, and to be taken in the arms of the Redeemer, and to be placed in Abraham's bosom, and to serve God to all eternity without fear, "in holiness and righteousness before him," through the mercy—the tender mercy—"whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us."

I say there are some few parents (few where there should be many) whose eyes are open after this manner, to see the things which belong to God and their peace :—to such, a baptized child in their house speaks continually of the presence of God—of the indwelling of God in the child of man, made His child by Grace, and acceptable and accepted through the blood and merits of Christ. Their faith tells them so to believe the words of the Lord Jesus,—“ Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;” their faith tells them so to believe in the efficacy of the Sacrament of Baptism,—in the “ outward visible sign of an inward spiritual grace given unto us ” in the Sacrament ordained by Christ Himself. Those who think not thus are, in this respect, unbelievers. Those who, believing in the mere word, have their children baptized, and who, denying the spirit of that word, look for another birth, as if the child were not born again in Baptism, are without faith

in *that* which the Church holds to be an essential part of Christian faith, and deny the truth of Christ's saying, and the power exercised by the Spirit in the ordinance of Baptism:—with them the poor infant is still a mere thing of flesh and blood,—helpless—bringing care and anxiety by its bodily weakness,—and not that precious thing which has been purchased at a costly price—even the blood of Christ; not that holy thing which angels would desire to look upon, and protect with outspread wings; not that part and portion of Christ which the presence and indwelling of the Father and the Son would testify; not that work of the Spirit in whom God is well pleased, as the voice from Heaven said, when the Spirit descended on the Saviour, and He rose out of the waters of Jordan, the eternal Dove descending on Him in the sight of John the Baptist.

But the Baptism of John in every other instance was with water only; and from the day that he baptized Jesus his power and influence decreased, and passed to Him who baptized with water and the Holy Ghost: and He hath taught us what to believe; He sent forth His disciples to do what we do,—that is, to preach, and teach, and to baptize: and when He was no more upon the earth, His holy servant Peter baptized in one day three thousand persons; and he called them to that holy rite, saying, “the promise is to you and to your children;” and St. Paul after him gave his testimony, and said, “as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ;” and

from that time until now it has been the custom and faith of the Church—a custom growing out of the faith—to baptize all children: and again I repeat, those parents who have a baptized infant in their houses, have a holy thing perpetually before them,—a mortal body, but a living soul,—a body into which sin hath not entered through the evil will; in which the stain of Adam's sin has been washed away; and their only cause of sorrow is the thought that, if permitted to live, it will not, by reason of the corrupt nature which remains even in the regenerate, be always thus holy; and this thought will work in them the anxious care, that they should use all diligence to keep it as long as possible unpolluted by sin, and so to bring it up in the faith and fear of God, as that it shall fear to offend, and repent when it has offended, and pray for grace to withstand temptation, and, in the power of the Spirit, to bring forth fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

This must be the wish, the desire, the prayer of Christian parents as they sit by the cradle of their infants, and bless God silently in their hearts. Nature—that law of God, which, without special revelation, commands that the parent shall love the child to which it gives birth—nature makes us desire that, though it will not always remain sinless, the infant may yet be permitted to live; we hope the sin may not be great, may not be without repentance, may not be without pardon, and that grace may be given—grace increased—and the child be renewed by the Spirit, and the

grown up man, or woman, be a true and faithful follower of the Lord Jesus. But our wishes and prayers are not always answered. If we could see into the future, if we could know the secret things of God, we should see His mercy, and pitying love ; we should know, perhaps, that where any special child is taken away in its infancy, the object is to save it from sorrow, or from sin, or from pain, such as would rend a parent's heart asunder only to think of. So the innocent, and the pure, and the holy, which are part of ourselves as it were, (and remember, the holiest part,) are sometimes taken from us. God wills not that they should be stained and polluted with sin. Christ will have His own admitted to see Him face to face ; the natural body is not a sufficiently rich case for such precious gem ; and He wills that it should return to the dust from whence it came, and that the living soul, whose life is derived from Himself, should rise, as He rose, with a glorified body, to be above the things of the earth, and among the things which are above, where He sitteth at the right hand of God. A great blow this to the law of nature, to the love commanded and implanted by God in the hearts of parents, towards those who are part and parcel of themselves ; but let those parents, (if indeed they believe as Christian parents should believe,) look on the dying or dead infant in the faith that Christ, by Baptism, has washed it clean from sin, has imparted the Holy Spirit, has made it a child of God, a part of Himself, a work of Grace. Who has the greatest part in that child ?

The first parents—they which out of flesh begat flesh? or He, who by His Spirit gave it a new birth, and made it Spirit? And if they, who by Baptism are born again and made children of God by adoption, are called shortly and speedily to the Inheritance which is their birthright, shall the parents grieve because their children are thought worthy of such blessedness? must they not rather fling themselves upon their faith, and say, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken, blessed be His Holy Name.” Shall they not, as they sit in silence, and mourn for the loss, acknowledge that Christ speaks at the death of the child the very words they heard at his Baptismal Birth, and says, “Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven.” I say, Christ speaks thus to believing parents, and the short natural sorrow will soon be turned into joy; the heaviness may endure for the night, their joy will come in the morning. It was a miracle of mercy, such as Christ works, such as John Baptist was not permitted to work, when our children were made by Baptism children of God; when the unclean by nature were made clean by Grace, by the washing of Regeneration and Renewing of the Holy Ghost. If any parents have such treasure taken from them, let them think, with tears of joy, that in the race that is set before them, their child has received the prize sooner than themselves; let them think that it is a very blessed privilege to walk the earth as the living and mortal parents of a living and for ever blessed and immortal soul;

that there is another link binding them to Heaven and its King, another motive for living unto Christ, another warning to turn away from worldliness and wickedness, another source of joy and thankfulness, as they lie waking in the stillness of night, and, as time goes on, wonder that they did not sooner rejoice, that they did not sooner wipe away their natural tears, did not sooner open their eyes to the selfishness of human sorrow. How could they ever have wished, even for a moment, will be then their thought, to stay the Lord's hand, or to retain in this miserable and sinful world the infant whom God was willing to receive into the glory and happiness of His Presence.

My brethren, there are none of you who, being parents, are not more or less interested in what God has permitted me to say to you this day.

Keep the Faith as taught by the Church—"ONE BAPTISM FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS"—believe not those who, leaving the Church, deny the Faith. Think that your children are by Baptism made holy; watch over *them*, watch over *yourselves*, lest the corrupt nature in them should rebel early through your neglect or bad example, and innocence and holiness be exchanged, sooner than you imagine possible, for sin and guilt. But if your children shall have been, or shall be taken from you, before yet their innocence shall have been exchanged for sin, bear yourselves as those who have given birth in your own bodies to children of God; and whilst you believe that they were made His children in Baptism, and that He

has taken them to be where He is, pray that you may be so penitent for your sins, so sustained by His grace, so strengthened by increased and increasing faith, as that you may look forward with assured hope to being written among the Spirits of just men made perfect, through Jesus the Mediator, the Redeemer, the First and the Last, who liveth and was dead, and behold He is alive for evermore. Amen.



















